

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE ~~10-A~~BALTIMORE SUN
21 May 1987

Soviet suspected of seeking to buy stolen U.S. data leaves Japan; 4 men seized

By Anthony Barbieri Jr.
Tokyo Bureau of The Sun

TOKYO — A Soviet diplomat suspected of trying to buy stolen U.S. military documents hurriedly left Japan yesterday after Japanese police announced they had broken up a four-member spy ring that has allegedly been selling American military secrets to the Soviet Union, and possibly to China, for the past five years.

Of the four men arrested Tuesday, all Japanese nationals, one is an employee and another a former employee of U.S. military bases in Japan.

Police said that when they searched the homes of the four men they found radio receivers, tapes of coded shortwave transmissions thought to have been broadcast from the Soviet Union and maps specifying drop points — including one beneath a tree trunk in a Tokyo graveyard.

Police said the four had been involved in about 100 transactions over the years in which U.S. military information was sold to Soviet agents in exchange for more than \$700,000.

One of the men, identified by police as Hiromi Date, 62, was arrested late Tuesday night in a Tokyo park as he was about to hand over documents stolen from the technical library at the U.S. air base at Yokota to a Tokyo-based Soviet trade representative.

Japanese police think the trade

representative, identified as V. B. Aksyonov, 35, is a KGB agent. He was briefly taken into custody after he was seized with Mr. Date but was soon released.

Police said Mr. Aksyonov refused to answer questions and left the country with his family at 11 a.m. yesterday aboard an Aeroflot jetliner bound for Moscow.

An official of the Soviet Embassy immediately charged that Mr. Aksyonov had been set up by police in a "planned fabrication" and that he returned to Moscow to avoid being "persecuted."

Later yesterday, the Japanese Foreign Ministry ordered a second Soviet, identified as A. I. Sokolov, 46, first secretary of the embassy, to appear for questioning by police about his involvement in the matter. But he was said to be in the Soviet Union on his annual leave and is now not expected to return to Tokyo.

It was not immediately clear what China's alleged part in the espionage ring might have been. Mr. Date was described as an employee of China Technical Center, a privately run research center in Tokyo.

One of the other men arrested, identified by police as Sadao Gotoh, 60, is an executive of a Japanese trading company that does business in China. Police think Mr. Gotoh may have sold much of the same material to the Chinese during his frequent trips to China.

The other two men arrested are Hiroshi Osumi, 65, an employee of the technical library at the Yokota

air base, just west of Tokyo, and Masateru Tachibana, 59, who was described as a writer and commentator on military affairs and who once worked at another U.S. air base in Japan.

U.S. military spokesmen in Japan declined to comment on the case except to say they were attempting to determine what kinds of documents may have been taken from U.S. files over the years and the extent of damage to U.S. security.

The spokesmen said the United States, which told police about the missing documents in February, will leave the investigation to the Japanese authorities.

Japanese police said that in their search of the homes of the arrested men, they found technical manuals relating to the repair and maintenance of American military aircraft, including the advanced F-16 Falcon fighter, that are used in Japan and the Far East.

One official of Japan's Self-Defense Agency, as the armed forces are known, said the documents stolen were not top-secret material but that, combined with information from other intelligence sources, they could have given the Soviets a better idea of the combat performance of planes such as the F-16.

The arrests are almost certain to increase the controversy over a proposal by the government to end Japan's status as the only major industrialized country without an anti-espionage law.

Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has tried twice to have an anti-espionage law passed but withdrew the measure both times in the face of strong opposition from human-rights activists, lawyers, the Japanese press and the organized left.